

Fast for Life

Hunger striker 'fights' nuclear risk

Society teaches young children to protect life by going to war. Yet rarely do citizens risk their lives to prevent war.

A 58 year-old Eugene native believes that people who "fight" nonviolently for peace must be willing to take the same risks a soldier takes on the battlefield.

Charles Gray and nine other peaceful warriors worldwide have committed themselves to an indefinite fast until "significant progress" is made towards nuclear arms control.

"Significant progress" includes the signing of a comprehensive test ban treaty by the nuclear powers, the halting of Cruise and Pershing II missile deployment by the United States or NATO and the dismantling of Soviet SS-20 missiles.

Other "significant" measures include:

- "Concrete" actions by governments to insure that the nuclear powers implement U.N. resolutions calling for a multilateral or bilateral freeze;

- A moratorium by the nuclear powers on development, testing, production and deployment of nuclear weapon systems;

- Great Britain cancelling its Trident program;

- And a Congressional resolution favoring a nuclear freeze, combined with a refusal to appropriate funds for military programs incompatible with that resolution.

"Some people say we're asking for a miracle. But if we're asking for a miracle, we're asking for what is necessary to prevent this world from going down the tube," Gray said at a press conference Friday morning.

"So many people have pointed out to us the danger that we're in, and yet it's so easy day by day to say 'Well, somehow we'll muddle through. I don't want to change my life too much. We can rely on our leaders.' We feel that if we continue along that line, we could very well see our world destroyed — and that is a morally intolerable thought," Gray said.

By starving themselves, the fasters will model themselves on Mahatma Gandhi, who believed fasting was the most powerful nonviolent method for bringing about social change.

Saturday evening Gray shared his last meal of lentil soup, garden-fresh vegetables and homemade bread with about 200 friends and supporters of the

Fast For Life movement in the Central Presbyterian church several blocks from campus.

Monday, Gray traveled to the U.S. fasting center in Oakland, Calif., where his wife, Dorothy Granada, 52, and two foreign fasters will stay for the fast's duration. Gray and the other fasters acknowledge the indefinite fast may lead to their deaths. Yet Gray said the seriousness of the arms race warrants risking death.

"I think there are times when we must be willing to risk our lives for what we really believe is precious. The very willingness to do that speaks to a lot of people in a very deep way, so it (fasting) can be a very effective way to use your life," Gray said in an interview Friday morning just after his press conference.

"I've got children and grandchildren — the world's children. It (the nuclear arms race) has got to stop. If I'm going to risk my life to stop that, I think that's a very good use of my life."

And because of the depth of the nuclear crisis, Gray said he was not the only one risking death.

"The entire planet is risking death. We may symbolize the vulnerability of the entire planet by our action. We're not interested in dying. We love life, and we want people to awaken and act — and we won't die. None of us will die."

Gray conceived of the fast nearly four years ago but did not inform the public of his idea until June 1982, at the U.N. Disarmament Conference in New York City. The fast, which began Aug. 6, commemorates the 38th anniversary of the Hiroshima atomic bombing. Yet 1983 is also an "absolutely critical year" in the arms race because 1983 may be the world's "last chance" to obtain a bilateral or multilateral freeze on the nuclear arms "madness."

Because of a "new generation" of nuclear hardware, the world may be facing a "point of no return," Gray said, referring to the deployment in Europe this fall of weapons with 'first-strike' accuracy. Because first-strike weapons could destroy another country's entire arsenal in one attack, they would undermine a nation's deterrent strength, which has prevented nuclear war so far, Gray said.

Yet the fasters hope to alert people to more than the threat of nuclear war.

By voluntarily starving themselves, the fasters

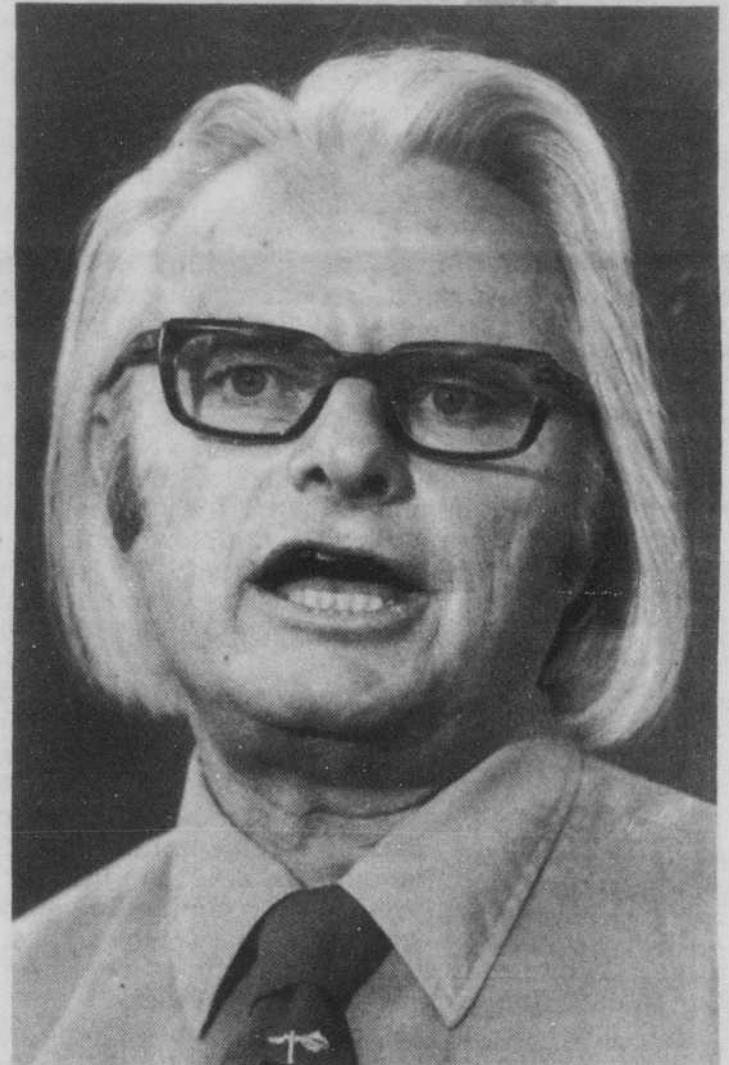


Photo by Mark Pynes

Charles Gray and eight others worldwide have vowed to fast until "significant progress" is made towards a nuclear freeze.

purposely draw a connection between the arms race and the "victims of the arms race" — 40,000 children who die of malnutrition each day.

"We're in a sense joining those people as the present victims of the arms race. We're saying we, too, will hunger until this madness is brought to an end."

This "silent holocaust" is due in part to the billions spent on the arms race, which could go toward feeding the world's hungry, said Gray, who taught sociology at Colorado State University and the University of Colorado before becoming a full-time

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Candles for Hiroshima

About 200 candles floated in the Alton Baker Park pond Saturday evening, launched in paper bags by the several hundred people who gathered in remembrance of the thousands who died in the atomic bombing of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945.

Between 60,000 and 300,000 people are estimated to have perished in the first of two nuclear blasts detonated in Japan within a three-day period 38 years ago.

Prior to the candle floating, which has become a worldwide tradition, Charles Gray of Fast for Life spoke to the crowd.

Photo by Mark Pynes